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RHMFSS/US SOUTHAF DAVIS MONTAN AFB AZ
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S E C R E T QUITO 001064

NOFORN
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E.O. 12958: DECL: TWENTY YEARS
TAGS: PREL MARR MOPS PTER EC CO
SUBJECT: ECUADOR ENUNCIATES ZERO TOLERANCE ALONG NORTHERN BORDER

REF: A. QUITO 357
 1B. QUITO 1042
 1C. QUITO 1059
 1D. QUITO 330
 1E. QUITO 53

Classified By: Ambassador Heather M. Hodges for Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: The Correa administration is enunciating a policy of "zero tolerance" and has issued strong warnings that it will use force against "illegal armed forces" or incursions by Colombian security units along its northern border. The warnings to the FARC have been public and vigorous; the warnings to Colombia have so far been implied, or in private to the USG (Ref C). President Correa clearly wants to appear tough on the FARC, and also wants to show support for the Ecuadorian military as it incurs casualties in its increased operations in the northern border region. The threat of force against the FARC is not new, a threat of force against Colombian armed forces, if true, raises concern. While a senior Ecuadorian military officer repeated to the Embassy on November 14 that Ecuador "is deploying" MANPADS to the northern border region, other senior officers downplayed any change in posture, asserting that MANPADS had not been moved and that there was no increased risk of clash with Colombian military. (End Summary)

¶2. (U) President Correa issued a strong statement to the FARC on November 12 that Ecuadorian security forces would attack if fired upon. "We shall respond with full force, enough is enough... and these FARC people better not dare fire even a single shot at an Ecuadorian soldier again." Correa made the statement during a visit to the residence of Second Corporal Jose Luis Estevez Pailacho, an Ecuadorian soldier who was wounded during a patrol operation in Sucumbios province, along the northern border. The Ecuadorian military patrol unit encountered a FARC base and was ambushed. Due to an allegedly delayed rescue, the soldier's leg was amputated. Correa made similar statements in April 2008 (Ref A).

¶3. (S/NF) Correa added in his public comments that "it is

time that the Colombian Government starts to control its territory... we (Ecuadorians) are paying a very dear price for a conflict that is not ours." Vice Minister Miguel Carvajal said in a separate televised interview on November 12 that Ecuador is pursuing a policy of containment, but that it is the responsibility of the Colombian Government to control its territory along its southern border (Ref B). Privately, an Ecuadorian armed forces officer told the Embassy that it would take action against Colombian security forces if they enter into Ecuadorian territory (Ref C). The Ecuadorian military has rules of engagement in place for the use of MANPADS, including several levels of authorization before firing. Although the President's authorization for the use of MANPADS has been reconfirmed, the Embassy has received conflicting reports as to their actual deployment.

¶4. (C) Correa asserted on November 12 that Ecuador has 7,000 soldiers on the northern border, plus 2,000 policemen, and that it costs over \$100 million to patrol its northern border. Including Pastaza province in the northern border region, the Embassy estimates the number of combat soldiers at 4,000, with another 2,000 conscripts. A maximum of four battalions may be deployed at any one time.

¶5. (SBU) Thanks to an increase in personnel and equipment, the Ecuadorian Armed Forces have clearly increased the intensity of their operations in the Northern Border (Refs D and E). The operational tempo, which already had been stepped up in late 2007, was increased even further after the March 1 Colombian attack on a FARC camp in Ecuador. A total

of more than 100 battalion-level operations led to the discovery and destruction of 11 cocaine producing laboratories and 130 FARC facilities (bases, houses, camps), the eradication of nine hectares of coca, and the confiscation of weapons, communications and other support equipment. The operations have resulted in the detention of 20 FARC members and the killing of one FARC member during the year. In his November 12 statements, Correa said that "seven Ecuadorian soldiers have fallen in the conflict," presumably during his presidency.

¶6. (S/NF) Comment: Since the March 1 attack, the Correa administration has put great importance on telling the world that it was conducting vigorous military efforts in the northern border region, in part perhaps to dispel accusations of ties to the FARC. That these words translated into a real increase in operational intensity and greater willingness to engage illegal armed groups in the area is due mostly to strong military leadership, in particular that of General Fabian Narvaez, Commander of the Fourth Joint Task Force (Ref C). The possible deployment of MANPADS and the suggestion that the Ecuadorian military would use force against the Colombian military, not just the FARC and other illegal armed groups, is new and raises concern on many levels. The Correa administration is remains deeply sensitive about sovereignty and control of its territory. The Embassy will continue to look for any actual changes in MANPADS deployments.

HODGES